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I Have Seen the Future and It "Doesn't Quite" Work

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If you love reading, or even merely like it, then you probably do not read eBooks. By reading, we mean a continuous, accumulative, deeply pleasurable and informative process. eBooks do not allow for this. They are painful to look at — not only aesthetically, but literally. Anyone who has spent hours reading digital text knows about the strain on the eyes. eBooks often lack pagination, tables of contents, and indices that make print books easy to navigate (Lynch, 1994).

Not that eBooks are not useful, even wondrous in their way. Digital texts have a flexibility that makes them very useful for research and retrieval purposes (Dillon, 2001). Print books can contain links to other works, i.e. footnotes and bibliographies, but the links in eBooks can take you right to, even into, the other work or works. Any book with an index can be used as a database, but eBooks have the built-in ability to index every word and not only index each word but run that list against other works. This ability to scan and analyze hundreds of texts using sophisticated pattern recognition software has revolutionized *Shakespearean* studies, for example, and will continue to make this a golden age for textual scholarship. *Safari*, an eBook vendor that specializes in technology, attributes its success to the fact that users can search thousands of tech books simultaneously and pinpoint the section they need (Miller, 2004). When a book is used as a database, it is not read in the conventional manner. Rather, it is sifted and mined for pertinent information. Librarians and researchers take advantage of this capability, which is why both continue to be interested in eBooks despite their drawbacks.

What if, however, eBooks want not only users, but readers? The rest of this paper addresses the problems raised by this question, including issues of page layout and formatting, highlighting of text, and the lack of standardization in the industry. Through our own heuristic evaluation we will also examine how two Web-based eBook vendors are tackling these issues.

Experts may debate whether an eBook is more like a database than a paper book, but most agree that the transition from paper to an electronic display presents technical problems. Take page layout, for example. Readers of print books generally don't think about it, which is the point. You are not supposed to notice the layout of a page, because it would probably interfere with your reading. The layout of books is standardized so that readers engage the text with minimum effort. The text in books almost always proceeds left to right in a linear fashion with

black type on white paper using one font, etc. Books that do otherwise, like *Sven Linqvist's History of Bombing*, are exceptions to this rule. Unlike readers, publishers of print books do care about page layout because it adds or subtracts



to the total page count and ultimate cost of printing the book. This is not the case with electronic books, where length does not add to cost (Gibbons, 2003). On the other hand, page layout is one of the first things readers of eBooks complain about. Let us consider line length. **Microsoft** found that readers prefer eight to twelve words per line. Long and short lines are disliked. It was also found that eleven point font is significantly faster to read than ten point font, and slightly faster than twelve point (Hill, 1999).

Readers of paper are also accustomed to well-defined features, such as page and character dimensions, a certain space ratio between words, and the color contrast between the characters and the white page (Landoni, 2000). eBooks lack this kind of standardization. As anyone who has worked in a digital environment knows, the font sizes and kerning that work on paper might not translate well on screen.

The **Electronic Book eXchange**, formed at the first **National Institute of Standards and Technology** on eBooks in 1998, came up with the laudable goal of creating an eBook equal in readability to paper books (Coyle, 2001). **Microsoft** thought readability so important for its own eBook product that it invested in **ClearType** technology, which triples the resolution of the text on the screen (Wilson, 2002). **Adobe**, a long time leader in font and publishing technologies, developed **CoolType**, a font-rendering technology that improves on-screen text resolution on digital liquid crystal display screens such as those used in flat-panel desktop monitors, laptops, and handheld devices (Adobe 2004).

netLibrary and **Books 24X7**, both Web-based eBook services, address some of these issues, both directly and indirectly. **netLibrary** now allows readers to adjust both font size and the size of the text window to suit their own preferences. The page has a word wrap function so the text automatically adjusts depending on the width of the window. If you prefer large text, but only eight to twelve words per line, you now have that option. **netLibrary** does not offer this option for books in PDF format. A font sizing option is also available in **Books 24X7**; although tech support says it is more a function of some Web browsers than a conscious decision to support readability (Ouellette, 2004).

Paper, the primary ingredient in printed books, allows for highlighting, scribbling

marginalia, and other methods of commentary and location, like the humble, but very useful, bookmark. A recent survey of eBook readers highlighted a number of preferences for eBook features with the most desired feature being the ability to open the eBook to the last page viewed (Henke, 2002). Yet neither **Books24X7** nor **netLibrary** directly offer the option to open the eBook to the last page viewed — though a net savvy reader may ac-

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complish this by creating a bookmark of their current page before logging out.

The ability to highlight text is another useful supplementary feature of printed books, allowing readers to retrieve pertinent information easily. How do eBooks allow people to retrieve such information? One option is to print out the desired text. However, anyone who has tried to print from a Web-based eBook knows it can become a logistical nightmare. eBook products, such as **netLibrary**, **Books 24X7**, and **Safari Tech Books**, usually display and print only one page at a time. In any event, printing is not always the favored option in a digital environment.

A usability study of **netLibrary** at **Indiana**

continued on page 58

I Have Seen the Future
from page 57

State University examined how patrons preserve digital content. Six participants were asked to find an eBook related to their field of study. They were then asked to save a portion of the book, as if they were doing research for a paper. Of the six participants, three users stated that they would perform a copy/paste as their first option. Two other participants suggested they would try to email the pertinent section — a feature that is not an option in **netLibrary**. (They came to this decision based upon the use of library databases that do allow users to email content to themselves.) Only two out of the six suggested that they would print the passage, but this was not their preferred choice (Englund, 2001). Nor, apparently, is it **netLibrary's**. Their current interface offers printing tips, but it is buried in the "reading tips" index, where you may also read a copyright warning about attempting to print the entire eBook.

ALA's eBook Task Force created a long list of functions that are believed to enhance readability and understanding and to make an eBook's content richer than a paper book. These functions include the ability to search both within the current text and other eBook texts; hyperlinks to items in the book, such as a table of contents, as well as related research; sufficient mark up and structure to provide a sense of content involving chapters or sections; and a sense of place that lets the reader know how far along he or she is in the book (Gibbons, 2003).

Both **Books 24X7** and **netLibrary** offer the option of being able to search within the current text or other eBook content. Both vendors also offer a way to virtually turn the page with a click of the mouse. However, only **Books 24X7** offers a progression bar to give the reader a sense of how far along he or she is in the book. With the ability to create your own folders, bookmarks, notes, even email the current page, **Books 24X7** offers the reader more functionality than **netLibrary**. **Books 24X7** calls it "a more user defined experience," but that experience also has a higher learning curve (Ouellette, 2004).

Technical considerations aside, is there a market for eBooks? If we are to believe the recent sales figures, then eBooks are here to stay. The **Open eBook Forum** reports that eBook retailers had modest gains in growth during the second quarter of 2004 with a five percent increase in eBook units sold and a 23 percent in-

against the grain people profile

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BORN & LIVED: Born in Buffalo, New York, lived in Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Buffalo (again), West Virginia, Iowa, Buffalo (again), Florida, Indiana, and (finally) Illinois.

EARLY LIFE: My father was a chemist who got transferred a lot, then I became a journalist and continued the tradition.

FAMILY: Married to a wonderful lady (special education teacher) and have one 16 year old son.

EDUCATION: B.A. (Theatre and Film). Master of Library Science. Master of Information Science.

FIRST JOB: Copy Cataloger.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: I have presented research on eBooks at the 2nd International Conference on the Future of the Book in Beijing, China (2004) and at the LITA national forum in Houston, Texas (2002). I presented on Streaming Media at the Endeavor International Users Group Meeting in Chicago, Illinois (2003), the LITA national forum in St. Louis, Missouri (2004), the Illinois Association of College and Research Libraries in Chicago, Illinois (2004), and the Endeavor Great Lakes User Group Meeting in Terre Haute, Indiana (2002).

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Officiate high school football and participate in community theater.

FAVORITE BOOKS: Whatever book I am currently reading.

PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD: Meetings that don't start on time.

PHILOSOPHY: Everything comes to he who waits, as long as he who waits works like hell while he waits!

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Presenting at the 2nd International Conference on the Future of the Book in Beijing, China.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: To be living and working in the same place I am today. As a journalist I never stayed in one place very long. That's why I'm no longer a journalist.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: I think we will continue to see more and more electronic sources and less and less paper sources. I don't believe the electronic book is quite ready for prime time except as a reference tool. I think people will continue to read paper books for leisure but in academia almost everything will be electronic.

crease in eBook revenues over the same quarter in 2003 (Bogarty, 2004). The consultancy firm **Accenture** predicts that eBooks will make up ten percent of all book sales by 2005, totalling 2.3 billion (Dorner, 2003).

So, who's buying, and does saleability equate to readability? **Lynch** sees "anecdotal evidence that younger people, who have grown up with text on display screens from childhood, are more

continued on page 59

Rumors
from page 49

already has a **North American Library Board** and a **European Library Board** is being set up currently. **CABI Publishing**, working under the umbrella of **CAB International**, is a leading international, not-for-profit, publisher of books, journals, databases, CD-ROMs and on-line information products in the applied life sciences. www.cabi-publishing.org

Not just the energetic **David Goodman** <dgoodman@liu.edu>, but LOTS of other

Charleston Conference regulars are among the article authors of a **Special Serials Review Issue on Open Access** (v.30, n 4). A must read! The issue is available at: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/00987913>.

The wonderful **Emily McElroy** <emcelroy@darkwing.uoregon.edu> sends information about the **Timberline Institute**, upcoming in May. **Timberline Lodge** is one hour east of Portland, Oregon, on the slope of Mount Hood. The conference will be held May 14-17, 2005. The registration form is available at <http://libweb.uoregon.edu/events/aitl/register.pdf>. Conference information is available at <http://libweb.uoregon.edu/events/aitl/>.

This is a great issue of **ATG** on eBooks and is compiled and edited by **Cris Ferguson** <cris.ferguson@furman.edu>, **Betty Kelly** and **Julie Carter** of **Furman University Libraries**. Despite sickness and holidays, it came together as a fabulous issue. Thanks to these wonderful women for putting it together!

We are already getting ideas for the **2005 Charleston Conference program**. Please send them to me as soon as you can so that we can start putting the program together. Also, what do y'all think of the theme this year of "**Things Are Seldom What They Seem**"? This is from

continued on page 71

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BORN & LIVED: Little Rock 1961; Pine Bluff, Ark 1961 - 1963; West Palm Beach Florida 1963 - 1965; Pine Bluff II 1965 - 1969; North Little Rock, Ark 1969 - 1979; New York City 1979 - 1985; Hattiesburg, Mississippi 1985 - 1993; New Orleans 1993 - 1995

Hattiesburg 1995; Little Rock, Ark 1995 - 1996; Baton Rouge 1996 - 2001; Macomb, Illinois 2001 to Present.

EARLY LIFE: Most of my early life was spent learning to walk, talk, and avoid authority figures. This prefigures my later and present life.

FAMILY: I am single and programmed to remain that way.

EDUCATION: BA Fordham University 1979 (Latin and English); Ph.D. University of Southern Mississippi 1995 (English); MLIS Louisiana State University 1997; I am starting an MS in Instructional Technology.

FIRST JOB: Paperboy for the *Arkansas Gazette* (1977 to 1979).

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Reference, Bibliographic Instruction, Collection Development, Programming, Grant Writing, Walking Around Hallucinating New Ideas.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Read (seriously—I really do like to read); take photographs; count the cats (12) and dogs (4) I share my life with; cruise for cute guys; advise my friends about how to snare cute guys; wonder where things went wrong with the cute guy I was dating—I didn't want to get married.

FAVORITE BOOKS: Andrew Holleran's *Dancer from the Dance*, Adrienne Rich's poetry, *Vanity Fair*, all of Evelyn Waugh, most anything by Edmund Wilson, *Barnaby Rudge* by Dickens, *Star Money* by Kathleen Winsor, *Pride and Prejudice*, I could go on and on...

PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD: Being late, waiting for other people who are late, the lack of movie theaters in my town, academic pretense and condescension, people who don't know Latin.

PHILOSOPHY: First do no harm. Second, be the first in line. Third: A library is not an emergency room. Fourth: Why not? Fifth: Beauty trumps reason. Six: Don't Ask and Never Never Tell.

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Leading the successful effort to get domestic partner benefits on my campus.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: Be ungodly rich, find myself in the arms of a very charming man, and continue to amuse myself and others.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: More of the same: More digital content; fewer people in the building; more need to rethink what we do (luckily there are lots of things to do if you know where/how to look); fewer librarians in the building, more librarians or librarian-like people working all over campus to help people connect with the information they need. Archives and Special Collections are going to be huge growth areas (as universities actually own (for the most part) the intellectual content contained in them. Anything that can be **reasonably** outsourced will be.

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I Have Seen the Future from page 58

likely to read from a computer screen and less insistent about printing" (Lynch, 2001). Eco claims some hackers, grown up on computers, have read great literary masterpieces on eBooks (Eco, 2003). Maybe so, but a casual scroll through the Amazon top twenty-five eBook

titles reveals a mix primarily of pornography, business titles, and computing books.

In the classic horror masterpiece, *Frankenstein*, the monster is created using electricity but the beast is not accepted and the town's people revolt. If we continue to attempt to electrify the printed book, will readers revolt, or are they ready to accept this half-book, half-beast we call an eBook? 